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SPEECH

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OF

MR. CALEB B. SMITH, OF INDIANA,

ON THE

OREGON QUESTION.

Delivered in the House of Representatives U. S., January 7, 1846.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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SPEECH.

The Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, having under consideration the joint resolution reported from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, directing the President to give notice to Great Britain that the United States will terminate the convention between the two Governments, providing for the joint occupation of the Oregon territory, at the expiration of twelve months—

Mr. CALEB B. SMITH, having obtained the floor, said, that an impression seemed to prevail, not only with gentlemen here, but through the public press, that the Oregon question was peculiarly a Western question. Appeals had been addressed to Western members, which seemed to indicate an opinion that the West alone had an interest in the question. It has also, said Mr. Smith, been frequently intimated that the West desired to involve the country in a war with Great Britain. The gentleman from Alabama, (Mr. YANCEY,) who has just taken his seat, has made an eloquent appeal to Western members to abate their warlike propensities, and to suffer the peace of the country to continue undisturbed. As a Western man myself, identified with the people of that section of the country, and sympathizing with their views and feelings, I disclaim, utterly, on their behalf, the sectional character with which it is sought to stamp this question. I deny that it is to be regarded in any peculiar sense as a Western question, or that it should be determined with any special reference to Western interests. It is true, Mr. Chairman, that the people of the West feel a deep interest in this question, and look with anxiety for its ultimate settlement. It is true that they appreciate fully the importance of the Oregon territory, as well as the title by which our Government claims it. It is true that there is, throughout the whole valley of the Mississippi, an ardent desire that the honor as well as the interest of the United States should be preserved in the maintenance of the just rights, not of the West alone, but of the whole country, in the Oregon territory. But, sir, I do not believe that the people of the West, any more than those of other sections of the Union, desire war with Great Britain, or any other nation. I do not believe that they desire that the settlement of this question should be submitted to the stern arbitrament of the sword, while other means of an honorable adjustment are left. A war with England would not, in my opinion, be the most certain means of securing our rights in Oregon. Without war they will be maintained. The arts of peace will more certainly and securely accomplish what we desire than war. For, although I cannot believe that the strong arms and patriotic hearts of the American people will ever suffer the territory to be wrested from us by a foreign foe, yet it cannot be denied that a war, at this time, with Great Britain, would greatly hazard its loss.

It has been urged that the West is inclined to favor a war upon the Ore-

gon question, because, it is alleged, that our people are remote from the point of danger, and that a war would occasion an increased market and an enhanced demand for their agricultural products. It is a great mistake, sir, to suppose that the people of the West will not be exposed to danger in the event of a war. They are not so insulated in their position, or so divided from their brethren, as to relieve them from a share of the common dangers. The history of the country abundantly proves that, in the day of her necessity, they were not so far distant but that they could hear her call, and were not too unmindful of her welfare to fly to the rescue, and spill their best blood in her defence. In the event of a war with Great Britain, the Canada border would become the principal scene of the contest. Those portions of the West which lie contiguous to our Northern lakes would be immediately exposed to the inroads of the enemy, and the West would furnish her full share of the armies upon which the Government would rely for either defence or invasion.

Nor is there any more truth, sir, in the assumption that the agricultural products of the Mississippi valley will derive an increased value from a foreign war. A war with Great Britain would at once cut off our exports. Our ports would be blockaded and our foreign markets destroyed. The productions of the West, instead of finding a market as they now do in Europe, would be compelled to seek purchasers at home; and, as a necessary consequence, their value would be greatly diminished. But, sir, I must be allowed, on behalf of that portion of the people of the West whom I have the honor to represent, utterly to disclaim and repudiate any considerations so sordid and selfish. I should blush to acknowledge any connection with them, if I could believe them capable of harboring a desire to involve the country in a war that they might speculate upon the blood and sufferings of other portions of the country. No, sir, if there is any peculiar feeling in the West—any special sensitiveness on this question in relation to the title of this Government to the Oregon territory, it springs from higher and nobler considerations. It is the result of a patriotic desire to see the integrity of the nation maintained, and the rights of our common country preserved. It is no mere sectional question; and I trust that, when it may become necessary, all sections of the country will be found uniting in any effort and any sacrifices which may be necessary to vindicate the national honor.

I cannot pretend, like the gentleman from Illinois, (Mr. BAKER,) to answer for the Whigs of Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, and Michigan. I can assume only to speak for those whom I represent. There may be a more martial feeling prevailing in some portions of the West than is to be found in Indiana. The gentleman from Illinois may be ambitious of covering his brow with the laurels which are to be acquired amid the "din of conflict and the strife of arms." Far be it from me, sir, to call in question either the valor or the chivalry of the people of Illinois. They have successfully established their claim to both, not only in the celebrated Black Hawk war, which was conducted to a most glorious result, but in the more recent, though no less glorious war in which they were engaged with the great and powerful Mormon nation. The shouts of triumph which arose from the hard fought field on which the Mormons were routed and overthrown, are yet ringing in our ears. Much less, sir, would I be disposed to question the valor of those gentlemen who represent that chivalrous peo-

ple here, with distinguished advantage to them, and honor to themselves; a portion of whom, if report has not erred, have won for themselves unfading laurels in both of those wars. (Here Mr. BAKER remarked, "I wish the gentleman would specify.") Sir, (said Mr. S.) I fear I should call the blush of modesty to that gentleman's cheek, should I recount the brilliant achievements which rumor has attributed to him in those memorable wars. And, sir, the distinguished gentleman before me, the honorable chairman of the Committee on Territories, (Mr. DOUGLASS,) is well understood to be a sharer in the same distinction, although his great modesty and well known diffidence might prevent him from claiming the meed of applause to which he is so justly entitled. But I beg leave to assure the gentleman, that a grateful country will fully appreciate the valor he has displayed amidst those martial scenes; and his praises will yet be sung, until they resound from the hills and valleys of the great West.

It is not my design, Mr. Chairman, in the discussion of this question, to enter into an examination of the title by which we claim the Oregon territory. The grounds of our title have been shown with signal ability by the able diplomatists to whom the negotiations have been entrusted by our Government. There is, however, one ground of title upon which our rights have been most eloquently urged here, which is so novel and peculiar in its character, that I must for a moment allude to it. I refer to the title of "*manifest destiny*." It has been urged, with much zeal, that "Oregon is ours by manifest destiny." I have examined, with some attention, the elaborate and able correspondence which has taken place between the plenipotentiaries of the two Governments in relation to the title to the Oregon territory; and although it is admitted by all that our Secretary of State has displayed our title with great force and perspicuity, yet I have looked in vain to that correspondence for any reference to this new, and, as some gentlemen seem to suppose it, irresistible title. It is certainly reasonable to presume that our negotiator, in his anxiety to convince, not only the British plenipotentiary, but the world, of the validity of our title and the justice of our claims, would have cited and urged all the evidences of our title which he supposed could, by any possibility, strengthen our claims or justify our pretensions. Yet I do not find that he has, at any time, urged that we have a title to Oregon by "*manifest destiny*." Vattel and Grotius, as well as all other writers upon the law of nations, will be searched in vain for evidence of the existence of such a title. This title is certainly a very comprehensive one, and, if established, will effectually put to rest all doubts and quibbles in regard to a title by treaty, discovery, exploration, or settlement. It would certainly possess one very important advantage over all the titles which have been recognised by civilized nations. Every nation must be allowed to judge of its own destiny, and of the rights which that destiny confers upon it. We can, therefore, extend our possessions and increase our dominions until they correspond with the grand conceptions we may form of our destiny. If Oregon is ours by "*manifest destiny*," so equally is California, Mexico, Canada, and all of the British provinces upon this continent. If our destiny gives us a right to them, we may as well at once commence the process of annexing or "*re-annexing*" them to the United States. It has been recently rumored that our Government has furnished our newly appointed minister to Mexico with instructions to open negotiations with Mexico for the purchase of California. Would it not be

as well to save to our Treasury the money which it may be proposed to expend in this purchase, and assert a title to California by "*manifest destiny*?" Our claim to that province upon the ground of destiny is certainly as strong as the title by *destiny* to Oregon. California is separated from Oregon by no natural barrier. They are divided but by an artificial line, and if the one is ours by "*manifest destiny*," I see not why the other is not equally so.

Sir, I have too much confidence in the strength and justice of our claims to the Oregon territory, to consent to base our title upon pretensions so ridiculous and absurd. What may be the ultimate designs of Providence in regard to our nation, or what may be our ultimate *destiny* is not yet made *manifest*. It cannot be disguised, that there is in this country a rapidly increasing lust for national aggrandizement—a thirst for territorial acquisitions—a longing for increased dominion. It is a spirit full of danger, and if fostered and encouraged, it needs not the spirit of prophecy to make manifest our destiny. Under the influence of this feeling, we have already cast wishful and longing eyes upon the provinces of our neighbors. The jealousy of other nations is already aroused against us, and we have reason to fear that the governments of Europe, as well as of our own continent, will be united against us to check our encroachments upon the rights of others.

The adverse claims of the United States and Great Britain to the Oregon territory, based as they are upon discoveries and explorations made by citizens of both countries, as well as upon treaties made by both Governments with Spain, are necessarily, to some extent, uncertain in their character, and present a fit subject for negotiation and compromise. I have, however, no hesitation in saying that we have a good title to all of the territory, as far north as the forty-ninth parallel of north latitude; and I would not desire to see our Government make any concessions to Great Britain beyond those which have already been offered. The questions in dispute between the two countries, in relation to the title, have been a subject of difference between us for nearly thirty years. Efforts have been made to compromise them, at different periods, and under different administrations, but without success. As early as 1818 it was agreed, that the territory in dispute should be open and free to the citizens and subjects of both countries. In 1827, this agreement was renewed for an indefinite period, with a stipulation that it might be terminated, by either Government, on giving to the other twelve months, notice. It is proposed by the resolution now before the House, that we shall give the year's notice to Great Britain, required by the joint convention, to terminate it. A question as important as this, and one which involves consequences to the country of the greatest magnitude, should be viewed and determined without any reference to party politics. I trust it will be so considered, and that party spirit may be suffered to exercise no influence in its settlement. It cannot, however, be concealed, that efforts have been made to give it a party complexion. Previous to 1844, the country universally acquiesced in the propriety of continuing the joint convention with Great Britain. But in the memorable political contest of that year, efforts were made to mingle the Oregon question with the elements of political strife, and to make it subservient to partizan triumph. The Democratic convention, which assembled at Baltimore in May, 1844, and nominated the present incumbent of the Presidency as the candidate of the Democratic party, presented the questions of Texas and Oregon as the twin off-

spring of Democracy. Our title to all of Oregon was asserted, as well as the determination to sustain that title. During the canvass which followed, it will be recollected, that an effort was made to create the impression that the Democrats were the peculiar friends of Oregon, and that the Whigs were in favor of surrendering a portion of it to Great Britain by negotiation. Mr. Clay was repeatedly denounced, not only through the press, but upon this floor, because, while Secretary of State, he had instructed our minister to England to offer to surrender to Great Britain all of the Oregon territory which lies north of the *forty-ninth* parallel of north latitude, as a compromise, although he believed our title to be good to the whole country up to fifty-four degrees and forty minutes. We all know the result of that contest. Mr. Polk was elected, and it was immediately announced that the public voice had decided that Texas must be annexed, and that our title to all of Oregon must be maintained. The annexation of Texas was pressed forward with hot haste, and its immediate consummation urged with a zeal which would admit of no delay. That measure having been disposed of, expectation was of course excited as to the course which was to be pursued by the incoming Administration in relation to the Oregon question. We all recollect the sensation which was produced, not only in this country, but in Europe, by the rhetorical flourish of the President, in his inaugural address, respecting our right to Oregon. Our title was "clear and unquestionable," and must be maintained, was authoritatively announced. This manifesto was shortly after followed by an equally emphatic declaration of our rights, and of the determination of the Government to sustain them, in the "official organ" of the Administration, heralded to the world under the imposing caption of "the whole of Oregon, or none." Who for one moment could have supposed, that an Administration, thus coming into power, with such lofty and high sounding pretensions upon this question—thus hearing the British lion in advance, and denouncing, in terms of vehement bitterness, those who before had offered to concede a portion of this territory to Great Britain for the sake of a compromise, would, within the first half year of its existence, offer to concede to the British Government, as large a portion of the Oregon territory as had been offered under the instructions of Mr. Clay while Secretary of State. While I was canvassing for a seat in this House, during the last summer, rumor whispered that the President had offered to surrender the country north of forty-nine. The rumor was there most stoutly denied by his friends. That which was then but rumor, faintly whispered, is now rendered a certainty. The message of the President has officially informed us, that he has renewed the offer of compromise formerly made, with the exception of the free navigation of the Columbia river. He has offered to surrender to the British Government all of the territory which lies north of the forty-ninth parallel of north latitude. Where now are the muttering thunders of Democratic vengeance which have been so profusely poured out upon Mr. Clay for sanctioning a similar offer? Where now are the oft repeated denunciations against "British Whigs," who would be willing to surrender any portion of the Oregon territory to a foreign government? The offer to surrender has been made by a Democratic Administration—by an Administration brought into existence under the vaunting resolutions of the Baltimore convention.

I have not, Mr. Chairman, referred to these matters for the purpose of denouncing or censuring the President for the offer which he has made to

compromise this vexed question. I approve of that offer, and only regret that it has not been accepted as the basis of a compromise. The country may find in the history of this question a useful lesson. They may learn to place a proper estimate upon the self-praised patriotism of those who have denounced all compromise, and have charged with partiality to a foreign government, those of our own citizens who have sought the means of preserving the peace of the country in attempts to settle the controversy by fair and honorable negotiation. This is not the first time in the history of parties when men have reached power upon pledges which they found it utterly impossible to carry out. The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. ADAMS) has told us that he believes we shall have no war upon this question, and as one reason for his opinion he predicts that the Administration will "*back out*" from its own positions. I shall not attempt to predict or to prejudge the Administration. Those who have been placed by the people at the head of the Government have assumed the responsibility of the negotiations upon this question, and to the country must they answer for the manner in which their responsibilities are discharged.

But, Mr. Chairman, to come more immediately to the question before the House, I desire to present some of the reasons which will induce me to vote against the joint resolution now under discussion. This resolution proposes that Congress shall terminate the convention now existing between this Government and the Government of Great Britain, which provides for the joint occupancy by the citizens of the two countries of the Oregon territory. I cannot regard the notice required to terminate that convention as a legislative act. As a member of the committee on Foreign Affairs my views upon this point have already been submitted to the House in the report of the minority of that committee. I believe the positions assumed in that report to be sound and well founded. The Constitution has wisely divided the powers of the Government between different departments. The line which separates those departments is clear and well defined. The legislative department ought not to trench upon or invade the province of the other departments. It will find enough to occupy its attention in its own legitimate sphere of action. The power to dissolve the convention with Great Britain is a power which belongs to the treaty-making department of the Government. By that department was the convention created, so far as this Government had an agency in it, and by it alone can it be terminated. Congress can neither make treaties nor alter or modify those already in existence. The joint convention by which the two countries have agreed to regulate the rights of their citizens to ingress to the country between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific, is a treaty between them. An abrogation of that part of the treaty which creates the right of joint occupancy would be an alteration of that treaty, and this alteration can only be effected by the same power which created it. The convention, as originally created in 1818, was limited by its own terms to a period of ten years. Before the expiration of that time it was renewed for an indefinite period, to be terminated by either party upon one year's notice. This notice, by which the convention is to be thus determined, must be given by one of the parties to the treaty to the other.

The treaty-making power of the Government, it seems clear to my mind, is alone capable of giving the notice. Congress, it is true, may adopt resolutions advisory in their character, and calculated to stimulate the Executive in the discharge of the duties properly pertaining to that branch of the Gov-

ernment. But such resolutions would have no weight beyond the moral power attached to them, as the opinions of those who immediately represent the people. The responsibility of the measure is placed by the Constitution in the hands of the Executive, and I see no good reason why that responsibility should be taken from that branch of the Government and exercised by Congress. There are other reasons, of great weight in my mind, why the question of giving the notice should be left with the Executive. The propriety of giving it, will, of course, depend much upon the state of negotiations with Great Britain. At the commencement of the present session, the President informed us that the negotiations had been brought to a close. They may, however, be renewed, and rumor is rife that they have been renewed. Great Britain may reconsider her hasty rejection of the proposition which has been made by the President; and I hesitate not to say, that, should she do so, and agree to accept the forty-ninth parallel as the boundary line between us, it would be the duty, as well as the interest, of this Government, to settle the question upon that basis. The President will, of course, at all times be advised of the state of the negotiations, and can better judge than Congress of the time when it would be proper to give the notice.

But, Mr. Chairman, if it should be admitted that the notice to terminate the joint convention can only be given through the action of Congress, it becomes us to deliberate maturely before we take that step. Our action in this matter may involve consequences more serious than are now anticipated. The step, when once taken, cannot be retraced, and we should look well to the effect which the measure may produce, before we adopt it. I am free to confess, that I have not been able to discover reasons sufficient to satisfy me that we should give the notice at this time. The joint convention between the United States and Great Britain has now been in force twenty-seven years. During that period, no effort has been made by Great Britain to terminate it, except by such negotiations as would settle, definitively, the whole question. Until within the last two years, but few in the United States have expressed the opinion that we should terminate it. There is no point of national honor which requires us to terminate it. Its continuance involves no sacrifice of principle or of interest. Our title to Oregon has lost nothing of its strength by the continuance of the convention, and surely will not become weaker by its longer continuance. But what is to be the effect of giving this notice? Those who advocate the resolution to give notice assure us that it is a pacific measure, and cannot be the means of producing war. If there is any gentleman here who desires to precipitate the country into a war, he has not the boldness to avow it. All are apparently the advocates of peace, and desire to adopt such measures as will produce pacific results. Is this a measure of that character? I confess, sir, I am not without serious apprehensions as to its results. The language used by the President in his message, to my mind, very clearly indicates that he regards it as the commencement of a series of measures which must result in war. I know not what are his private opinions, or what opinions he has expressed in his intercourse with others. I can only judge of his opinions from his official declarations. In his message he says:

“The extraordinary and wholly inadmissible demands of the British Government, and the rejection of the proposition made in deference alone to what had been done by my predecessors, and the implied obligation which their acts seemed to impose, afford satisfactory evidence that no com-

promise which the United States ought to accept can be effected. With this conviction, the proposition of compromise which had been made and rejected, was, by my direction, subsequently withdrawn, and our title to the whole Oregon territory asserted, and, as is believed, maintained by irrefragable facts and arguments."

In this part of the message the President assumes that "no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected." Well, sir, if the President believes that "no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected," what must we infer is his opinion as to the result of the question? He certainly cannot believe, if Great Britain will agree to no reasonable compromise, that she will surrender unconditionally all claim to the territory, and suffer our Government to take undisputed possession of the whole of it. The inference, then, is irresistible, that he believes the question must be settled by the arbitrament of the sword. This inference is strengthened by his language in another part of his message, in which he says:

"At the end of the year's notice, should Congress think it proper to make provision for giving that notice, we shall have reached a period when the national rights in Oregon must either be abandoned or firmly maintained. That they cannot be abandoned without a sacrifice of both national honor and interest, is too clear to admit of doubt."

The opinion of the President, then, is clear and undisguised, that if this notice to terminate the joint convention shall be given to Great Britain, we shall be compelled, at the expiration of the year, to assert our claims to Oregon at the point of the bayonet. In this opinion I fully concur. When the joint convention shall be terminated, we must then, at all hazards, take possession of the country, and compel Great Britain, by force, to abandon her pretensions. A war, then, can only be avoided by Great Britain surrendering her claims. Have we any reason to anticipate that she will do this? If she has refused, upon negotiation, to make any compromise which our Government can accept, can we believe that she will be driven by menace to an unconditional surrender? The pride and arrogance which she has at all times manifested in the assertion of what she has claimed as her rights, however they may be calculated to excite on our part feelings of indignation and hostility to her, yet fully show that we have no reason to count on her forbearance in the present controversy. The giving of the notice, it is true, is not of itself a war measure. Had the notice been given by the Executive, while the negotiations were progressing, it is highly probable that no injury could have resulted from it. It might, indeed, have led to an earlier settlement of the whole subject of controversy; because, while it could not then have given any ground of offence to the British Government, it would have impressed upon the negotiators of both countries the necessity of an early and definitive settlement as the only means of preserving peace. The state of affairs, however, has materially changed. The President has abruptly terminated the negotiations, and withdrawn the proposition of compromise which he had made, alleging, at the same time, that he had only made that proposition in deference to the opinions and acts of his predecessors, and against his own convictions of right. At the same time he recommends to Congress to give the notice, as the preparatory step to the assertion of the claims of this Government, not alone to the territory as far north as forty-nine, but to the

whole of the Oregon territory—to the Russian line, at fifty-four forty. He distinctly informs us that, at the expiration of the year, we must either firmly assert our rights to the territory, or abandon them altogether. The plain and simple meaning of this is, that, at the expiration of the year, we must take possession of the whole of the country, and drive the subjects of the English Government from every part of it. At the same time, the discussions upon this question, both in Congress and through the public press, are conducted in a spirit of self-laudation and boastful eulogy of ourselves, and of bitter and vehement denunciation against Great Britain, calculated to excite feelings of reciprocal hostility between the people of the two countries. If this notice is now given under these circumstances, with the avowed declaration on the part of our Government that it is intended as a preparatory measure to the assertion of our claims to all of Oregon—with the angry passions of the people of both countries stirred up into mutual hatred—can we hope that negotiations will be renewed? Can we flatter ourselves into the belief that we can so operate upon the fears of Great Britain as to extort from her by menace that which she has refused as a proposition of compromise? If she has refused the offers which we have already made, will the assertion of a determination on our part to force her into a submission to our demands, induce her at once to abandon her pretensions? Sir, I cannot, for one moment, believe it. I am irresistibly led to the conclusion, that the giving of this notice, at this time, in the manner and under the circumstances in which it is proposed to give it, will effectually close the door to all future negotiations, and leave this controversy to be settled by the stern arbitrament of the sword. By this measure we shall “cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war” to desolate the country. It may not be difficult to get into a war, but it may be extremely difficult to get out of it. After years of fighting, after the sacrifice of millions of our treasure, and the lives of thousands of our citizens, we shall still be compelled to settle the controversy by negotiation. May not negotiation be as successful now as then; and would it not be good policy to exhaust the means of diplomacy and negotiation, before we resort to harsher or sterner measures?

But, Mr. Chairman, if this question must be ultimately settled by the sword—if to secure our just rights in the Oregon territory it is necessary that we should engage in war with Great Britain, I would ask, are we in a condition to commence a war at this time? Does not every consideration of prudence and discretion require that we should make some preparation before we commence hostilities with the most powerful nation in the world? Every one who is familiar with the history of the last war with Great Britain is well aware of the difficulties we encountered from the unprepared condition of the country when we engaged in it. The Government was crippled in its operations from the want of effective means to carry on the war. It is true, sir, that our gallant navy won for itself imperishable renown by its brilliant achievements; it is true, that the cross of St. George was compelled to yield, upon its own favorite element, in many a fierce conflict, to the stars and stripes; it is true that our valiant army covered itself with laurels whenever it could meet the enemy upon a fair field, and without too great a disparity of force. But, sir, these successes only show how much more effective might have been our operations, and how much more brilliant might have been our success, if the resources and energies of the nation

had been properly marshalled for the conflict before its commencement. And ought we not, sir, to profit by the experience of the past? Shall we derive no instruction from the lessons which we have so abundant reason to remember? Every gentleman here must know, and does know, that the country is not prepared for war. With no navy but a few vessels, barely sufficient to afford protection to our commerce in time of peace; with no army but a few regiments, constituting merely the nucleus of a military force; without fortifications or other means of defence upon our coasts; with our harbors unprotected, and our Atlantic cities defenceless, we are called upon to adopt measures calculated to involve us at once in a war with a nation fully prepared and armed at all points. Great Britain is fully prepared for a conflict of the most desperate character. During the past year all her immense resources have been applied to the increase of her naval and military power. She has at this time a navy exceeding in efficient force any which has ever before been afloat. Even now she is engaged in rapidly increasing her already immense means, of both offensive and defensive warfare. At peace with all the world besides, she can concentrate all her energies and resources for the contest with us, if a contest must ensue. We cannot be insensible to the extraordinary preparations made by the British Government during the past year. What may be the object of them we are left to conjecture. Whether that Government is arming to defend its claims to the Oregon territory, or whether it may be to meet any other object, we of course have no means of knowing. But whatever may be the object of her preparations, they place her in a condition to operate most effectively against us, should we engage in hostilities.

Sir, if we are to have war, we should at once commence active preparations to meet it. If we are to adopt a measure which is to involve us in hostilities, we should immediately provide means for the defence of the country. The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. ADAMS) said, a few days since, with much force and eloquence, while we are talking about raising two regiments of riflemen, and organizing a corps of miners and sappers, Great Britain is arming her steamers, and preparing for a crisis, with an energy and vigor unparalleled in the history of civilized nations. Shall we neglect the warnings which are around us, until we are aroused from our state of fancied security by the thundering of the enemies' artillery upon our coasts, and the flames of our burning cities?

Mr. Chairman, if the measure now under consideration, and which I cannot regard in any other light than a war measure, shall pass, our duty to the country will, in my opinion, require us immediately to adopt efficient means to place the country in a state of defence. I would not "prepare the hearts of the people for war" by appealing to their passions, and exciting their national prejudices; but I would prepare their arms for vigorous and successful defence. If we must have war, let us furnish the Administration with the means of prosecuting it vigorously and successfully. Whatever may be my want of confidence in those in whose hands the control of the Government has been placed, my vote shall be freely given for any appropriations they may ask to enable them to defend the country or protect its citizens. Unpalatable as taxation may be to my constituents, I shall not hesitate to aid in imposing upon them any amount which may be necessary to meet the crisis. Should war unfortunately come, however gentlemen may attempt to make political capital by raising the cry of "British party,"

no such party, I feel assured, will be found. When that crisis shall come, we shall be one in sentiment as we are one in destiny; and the free millions of the American people will unite their energies, and vie with each other, in sacrifices to place the stars and stripes of our national flag in triumph on every field and every sea.

I believe, sir, that no injury can result to this Government by a continuance of the convention with Great Britain. The territory is rapidly filling up with a hardy American population. The Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs has informed us that there are already seven thousand American emigrants there. In a very short period the number will be quadrupled. The British Government is making no effort to colonize Oregon. The only British subjects in the territory are those who are connected with the Hudson's Bay Company. Their number is but small, and their object is not to make permanent settlements, but to carry on a traffic with the Indians. Every year is giving to the American settlers additional strength. Let peace but continue, and but a short time will elapse until they will have strength sufficient to protect themselves, and defend the country against any power which may be brought against them. I am willing to aid in the adoption of any measures which may be necessary to their protection and security; consistent with the treaty stipulations into which we have entered. Let us afford to them the protection of our laws. Let us increase the facilities of emigration; and by stockade forts, or any other means which may be necessary, enable them safely and securely to reach the country. There can surely be no pressing necessity for the immediate organization of a territorial government for the accommodation of a population of but seven thousand—a population hardly equalling the half of the population of an ordinary county in one of the States. In the meantime opportunity may be afforded for the peaceful settlement of the controversy with Great Britain in regard to the title. If the controversy cannot be settled peaceably, and we shall be compelled to settle it by "*wager of battle*," we may, in the meantime, collect our resources, and place ourselves in a position to defend the territory successfully.

But, Mr. Chairman, I cannot bring my mind to the belief, that two nations like the United States and Great Britain will suffer themselves to be forced into a war upon a question like this. We have repeatedly offered to surrender to Great Britain all of the territory which lies north of forty-nine. She has offered to surrender to us all that lies south of the Columbia river. The strip of territory between these boundaries, and which is the territory in dispute between the two Governments, is but trifling; trifling in extent, and trifling in importance, when compared with the calamitous consequences which must result from a war between two such nations. But a short time has elapsed since we discharged the last of the national debt contracted during the late war. A war with Great Britain now, would compel us to contract a debt greatly beyond any we have ever before contracted. Hundreds of millions would be required to carry us through it, and when peace should again dawn upon us, we should have a load of national debt resting upon our shoulders which would require the energies and sacrifices of generations to remove. But this evil, great as it might be, would be one of the smallest resulting from a war. The destruction of our property—the loss of our commerce with other nations—the sacrifice of the lives of many thousands of our best citizens—the demoralization of the country, always a

consequence of war—and the shock which would be given to the principles of free government—would heap up an accumulation of evil, from the effects of which it would require many years of peaceful prosperity to enable us to recover. From these evils I cannot but most earnestly desire to see my country escape. They are evils which ought not to be lightly incurred; and I cannot consent, as one of the representatives of the people, by any vote or act of mine, to aid in bringing the country to a crisis in which they must be incurred.

There is no principle of necessity, there is no point of national honor, which requires us to incur them. Instead of vindicating our national honor, we should incur most deep dishonor by hurrying precipitately into a war upon a question which may be well and honorably adjusted without it.

I deny, sir, the proposition which has been asserted, that there is no longer any prospect of a compromise of this question. I believe, firmly, that if the notice to terminate the joint convention shall not be given, we shall have a speedy and honorable adjustment of the matter with the Government of Great Britain. It has been stated, and upon what many suppose to be good authority, that the British Government did not entirely approve of the hasty rejection, by Mr. Pakenham, of the offer of compromise made by Mr. Polk. In making that offer, I think Mr. Polk acted wisely; and however loudly some of his friends may raise the shout of "*All of Oregon, or none!*" he will be fully sustained by the approving voice of the nation. It is too late to say, that the rights of Great Britain and the United States, in the Oregon territory, are not a proper subject of compromise. Our Government, for the last thirty years, in all the negotiations upon this subject, has admitted that Great Britain has some rights there; and has repeatedly offered to surrender to her a large portion of the territory. We cannot, if we would, disregard the previous negotiations. We cannot now repudiate the previous admissions and acknowledgments of our own Government, and insist upon an unconditional and absolute surrender of all claim on the part of the British Government. By pursuing this course, we should not only array Great Britain in hostility against us, but the sympathies of other nations would be enlisted in her favor.

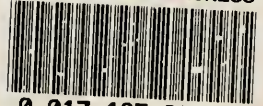
I do not believe that Great Britain desires to engage in a war with us upon this question. Her desire for peace is evidenced by the offer which she has made to settle the controversy by arbitration. I avail myself of this opportunity to express my deliberate conviction, that it is the imperative duty of this Government to accept of that mode of settlement of the controversy, rather than to engage in a war. It is objected to a settlement of the question by arbitration, that any monarch to whom it might be referred, would, from prejudices against a republican government, make an award against our claim. Sir, it is not necessary that we should submit the question to any monarch. It might be referred to arbitrators, consisting of eminent citizens of our own country, in connection with citizens of Great Britain and other nations of Europe. Should we have any reason to doubt or distrust an umpirage of this character? I believe not, sir. I believe the interest and the honor of this country would be safe, confided to such hands; and I can see no sufficient reason why our Government should refuse to submit to such an arbitrament. By a reference of the question in dispute to arbitrators, we make no concessions inconsistent with the honor of the

nation. If our title is "clear and unquestionable," we have no reason to fear that a decision will be made adversely to us. Beyond all doubt, we should, by an award of disinterested arbitrators, obtain terms of settlement at least as favorable as those which we have now at four different periods offered to Great Britain. All peaceable means of settling the question should be exhausted, before a resort should be had to arms. The civilized world will justly hold us responsible, if we adopt measures calculated to disturb the general peace, while it may honorably be avoided.

Efforts have been made, both in this country and in England, to inflame the public mind, and produce feelings of mutual hostility, which have doubtless exercised a prejudicial influence upon the negotiations. This is greatly to be regretted. A course of this kind can effect nothing but evil. We shall gain neither the respect nor the good will of other nations, by swelling praises of our own patriotism, or vauntings of our valor. A settlement of the controversy cannot be facilitated by indulging in eulogies upon ourselves or abuse of Great Britain.

I am not insensible, Mr. Chairman, to the danger of denunciation, to which I expose myself, by advocating pacific measures. I know that there is a chord in the popular mind which can be made to vibrate sensibly by the warlike appeals which are made to the feelings and passion of the people. I know the influence which may be excited by sneering allusions to the "*peace party*." But, sir, I cannot suffer myself to be swerved from the conscientious discharge of the duty which I owe to my constituents by any fear of denunciations, or by any regard for personal considerations. I feel assured that their interest, and the interest of the whole country, will be best promoted by peace. I know that the spread of free principles, and the triumph of republican institutions, can only be secured by peace. I know that war is a great and terrible calamity, only to be endured in the last extremity—a resort for the settlement of national difficulties, imposing unmitigated evil upon both parties, and never to be justified, but as the only means of preserving the honor or the rights of a nation. We have not reached a crisis when it is necessary for the maintenance of either our honor or interest that we should resort to this extreme mode of settling our difficulties. I cannot, therefore, give my support to a measure which I believe is calculated to place us in a position in which war will be inevitable. I prefer rather to pursue that course which will lead to pacific measures and honorable results; trusting and believing, as I do most confidently, that I shall find my vindication in the sober and discreet judgment of my own constituents.

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